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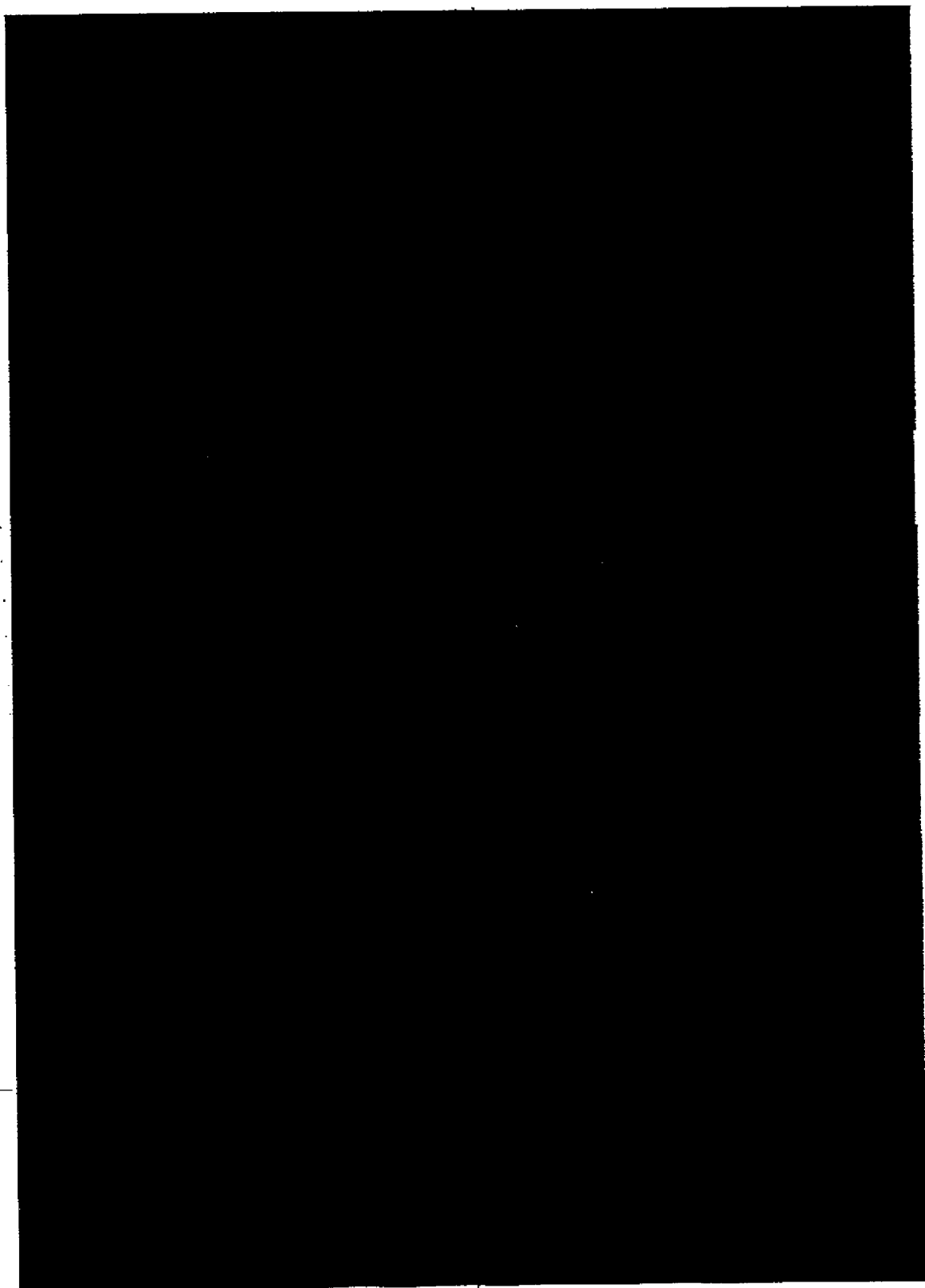
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CHILE

Criticism of Pinochet

Chilean President Pinochet appears to be under growing fire from junta members and high military officers about charges of Chilean complicity in the murder of former Foreign Minister Letelier. The case is having damaging repercussions domestically and internationally.

The abrupt resignation on Tuesday of former intelligence chief General Manuel Contreras from his post as commander of the Army Engineering Corps may be calculated to get Pinochet's government off the hook, but the maneuver could backfire.

If the trail in the Letelier investigation has led to Contreras, Pinochet will find it hard to shake his own of complete responsibility. He may face strong resistance within the armed forces—possibly including a plot against him.

Air Force commander General Leigh, a member of the junta whose relations with Pinochet have grown increasingly strained,

is already angling as the Prime Minister for his handling of the Letelier matter, which Leigh describes as "a Chilean Watergate." Some senior Army officers are also expressing concerns about the impact of the investigation on the image of the Chilean armed forces.

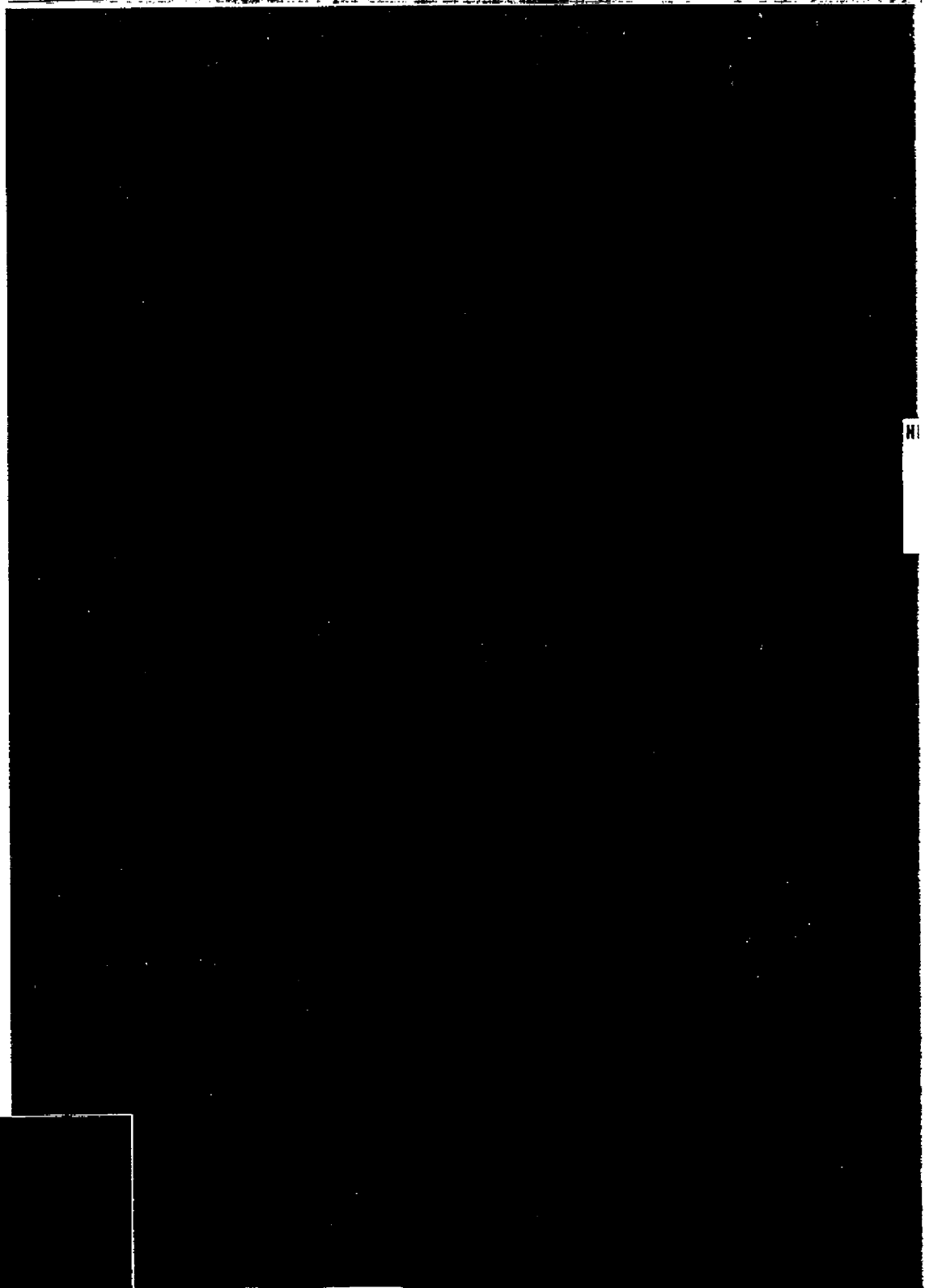
There are no signs that dissatisfaction with Pinochet is widespread within the military, and Leigh is likely to keep his criticism within acceptable bounds until further evidence is available on the Letelier affair. Leigh does not consider himself an alternative to Pinochet, and the Army would not accept any junta president except an Army officer.

Pinochet may ride out the storm if his government can divert blame or refuse charges that it was involved somehow in the assassination. If the government cannot avoid being incriminated, however, Pinochet is likely to find his position precarious and his power open to challenge for the first time.

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